

BOOKS ON EDUCATION ¹

These lists of books were developed in the post 1977 enthusiasm. Today on the internet several such lists are available, but unfortunately they are not selectively annotated and leave a new education enthusiast bewildered. This article is a product of cooperation of several enthusiasts who have known, used and promoted these classics on education for years.

After the Second World War, the 1960s saw a new kind of upheaval. Among other events it included the Vietnam War protests in the USA, student movements all over the world, the Sino-Soviet debate, Cultural Revolution in China and the Naxalite movement in India. In its wake came a vigorous critique of the educational system (along with issues of race, gender and health). Books like **Danger School**, **How Children Fail**, and **Letter to a Teacher** were published during this time. There was a search for alternatives in education. People sought to know about earlier educational experiments and efforts like that of Tolstoy and Montessori. In India Tagore's and Gandhi's experiments were studied with increased interest. There was concern that though constitutions were egalitarian and guaranteed educational opportunities for all, still the Black children in America or workers' children in Italy, like the SC/ ST children in India were dropping out or failing in large numbers. Education system served to maintain and reproduce the classes.

In India also innovative educational efforts started. In the 70s - significantly in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and also in other parts of the country, and more recently in Bihar. Educational journals like **Naya Shikshak** and **Palash** brought to fore and made accessible much of the progressive thinking in education. Krishna Kumar's **Raj, Samaj Aur Shiksha** was written during this period. Many books on education were read, reviewed and discussed during this period. Over time some 25 of the most discussed books (see Appendix) were selected. Because of this process most of these books were available in Hindi either in the form of books or journals. A group of individuals has been promoting the spread of these book and educational ideas. Many of the books are available and being read in English - particularly in the South.

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In Andhra Pradesh also, because of the level of political activity and an awareness of these issues many of the books have been translated and published in Telugu. Many others are in the process of being translated and published by various interested publishers. In fact some very good books like, **Letter to a Teacher**, **Danger School**, **Preparation for Understanding** & Tagore's **Shiksha** have been out of print for quite some time. They need to be printed urgently. Some good books like **How Children Fail**, Tolstoy's **On Education** need to be translated. On the other hand some original works in Telugu also are very good e.g. Namini's *Ischoolu Pillakaayala Katha*.

Select Book List

We have divided the list in three groups, viz, Politics of Education, Child Centered Education and Vision of Education. Evidently the contents of these books will not strictly follow these divisions. Tolstoy for example was a visionary, deeply aware of the politics of education and contributed significantly to child centered education. In fact he has been called the father of child centered education. All the same the broad division helps us to recognize what we are looking for in these books.

In each section we have tried to order the list in terms of easy access to the reader. Thus in the section 'Politics of Education' the first book is **Letter to a Teacher** is actually written by eight Italian poor children who failed and later studied in a school for dropouts. The first paragraph of the book announces the angry and eloquent tone of the remainder of the text:

Dear Miss,

You don't remember me or my name. You have failed so many of us. On the other hand I have often had thoughts about you, and the other teachers, and about the institution which you call 'school' and about the kids that you fail. You fail us right out into the fields and factories and there you forget us.

The book is a powerful critic of the mainstream school system and is written in a straight forward simple style. In fact it is a model of how to write and handle statistics! **Danger School** is a book with illustration and is a critic of the school system in North America. **John Holt's How Children Fail** is a classic of class room politics. Holt is also a powerful advocate of out of school education. Krishna Kumar is a fine scholar of education in India and his books have educated all of us about the Indian education scene. Myron Weiner's writings have

influenced most child labour eradication projects. They make a powerful case for state run compulsory education system. The second book is a lecture and hence small and easy to read. **Facts against Myth, is by 'Campaign against Child Labour'**, which demystifies media created myths about child labour. It is again a small pamphlet, very easy to read.

In the section 'Child Centered Education', we begin with, a fictional but very charming account of a school, **Divaswapna, by Gijubhai**, the pioneer of Montessori education, in India. It is followed by equally charming account of a school, **Tottochan by Tetsuko Kuroyangi** in Japan. These two books together have sold more copies than all the books in the list. It was Arvind Gupta who perused the National Book Trust to bring them out in English and several Indian language editions. But even before NBT came into the picture several editions in several languages were circulating. Many readers, after reading the book ordered several copies to distribute them to their friends. **A.S Neill's Summerhill**, a co-educational boarding school in Suffolk, England, is the original alternative 'free' school. Founded in 1921, it continues to be an influential model for progressive, democratic education around the world.

Preparation for Understanding is actually based on a book written by **Richard B. Gregg**, a Gandhian economist, who ran a school in Himachal Pradesh. It is a very useful compendium of teaching tools for small children using material available in a village. **Teacher by Sylvia Ashton Warner** is again a classic of language teaching for small children. The book describes methods in which children decide what they want to learn. **Child's Language and the Teacher by Krishna Kumar** brings out the best in language teaching in the world for an average interested reader. **To Children I Give My Heart by V. Sukhomlynsky** is a rich Russian book about children and has inspired many. The three books **The Open Classroom by K. Margaret**, **How to Use the Blackboard by David Horsburgh** and **The Blackboard Book by Eleanor Watts** describe experiences of contemporary Indian alternative school movement and have a lot of practical experiences.

The section on Visions of Education basically deals with works of **Tolstoy, Tagore, Gandhi** and the Soviet educationist **Anton Makarenko**. Unfortunately Tolstoy's works in English are not easily available, although on the net you can get some on 'Books Online'. Again all of Tagore writings are not available in English.

Both Tolstoy and Tagore were great authors and contributed to the world literature in a big way. However both thought that their work in education was the most significant aspect of their work. Both ran

schools and contributed to children's literature. Gandhi on the other hand had a moral and economic programme on education. **Mulk Raj Anand** in his small book **On Education** critically examines it and combines it with Tagore's approach with art education. Makarenko's experience was mainly with the so called 'juvenile delinquents, but he is a profound thinker and practitioner and has a wonderful understanding of children. His **Book for parents'** is a very heart warming book.

While almost all authors agree on discrimination against the poor that exists in the school system they do not agree on a solution. As a rule the libertarians or anarchists believe in running their own school whereas others believe in demanding from the welfare state equal rights. This debates runs right through in all the sections above

In education the libertarian or anarchist trend has been very influential because the idea of freedom is at the core of most education thinkers. Tolstoy, John Holt and A. S. Neil have been articulate about it. A very good review of this trend is available in **Underground of Education** by ...This book is not included in this list because I bought this book several times in the second hand book market. Another book not included in the list is **Deschooling Society** by **Ivan Illich** mainly because the language is very difficult.

Availability

One of the first question people will ask about the availability of these books. I am afraid at no time all the books will be available. Most of us collected them over time. There are two bookstores which have tried to make many of these books available. They are: the Other India Bookstore, Mapusa, Goa, www.otherindiabookstore.com and Earthcare Books in Kolkata, www.earthcarebooks.com. Both supply books by post as well as you can order them online. Arvind Gupta has put many of these books online on his site: www.arvindguptatoys.com

Appendix

SELECT LIST OF BOOKS ON EDUCATION

Politics of Education

1. Letter to Teacher by School of Barbiana
2. Danger School by IDAC
3. How Children Fail by John Holt
4. Social Character of Learning by Krishna Kumar
5. Political Agenda of Education by Krishna Kumar
6. The State and the Child in India by Myron Weiner
7. Compulsory Education and Child Labour by Myron Weiner
8. Facts against Myths - Child Labour by M. Kamat

Child Centered Education

9. Divaswapna by Gijubhai
10. Tottochan by T. Kuruyonagi
11. Summerhill by A. S. Neil
12. Preparation for Understanding by Keith Warren
13. Teacher by S. A. Warner
14. Child's Language and the Teacher by Krishna Kumar
15. To Children I Give My Heart by V. Sukhomlynsky
16. The Open Classroom by K. Margaret
17. How to Use the Blackboard by David Horsburgh
18. The Blackboard Book by Eleanor Watts

Vision of Education

19. On Popular Education by Leo Tolstoy
20. Tagore - Pioneer in Education by Elmhurst
21. Basic Education by M. K. Gandhi
22. The Story of Nai Talim by Marjorie Sykes
23. On Education by Mulk Raj Anand
24. Road to Life by Anton Makarenko
25. Book for Parents by Anton Makarenko